



PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

U.S. Embassy

Tripoli, Libya



Keynote Address to the Space Campers

Tripoli, Libya
December 16th, 2009

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen!

Good Afternoon Space Campers!

My wife Annette and I would like to welcome you to our home to celebrate an amazing accomplishment by 24 remarkable Libyan students, their teachers, and a Libyan film crew. In a few minutes, we will watch the World Premiere of the Libyan Space Camp documentary entitled “One Small Step, One Giant Leap.” This film – and the Space Camp experience – demonstrates the many positive, impressive things that Libyans and Americans can do when we work together.

The stars of the film are the Space Campers themselves -- your sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbors. In August of this year, they boldly went where no Libyan had gone before: to participate in a once in a lifetime experience at NASA’s Advanced Space Academy. It is our hope that this Space Camp experience is just the first step in fostering these young adults’ passion for science and international exchanges.

Although today represents the World Premiere of the Space Camp movie, you Space Campers are already quite famous in Washington D.C. and beyond!

On December 2nd, I was asked to present a sneak peak of the documentary at a conference attended by 22 American Ambassadors to Middle East countries. The film and the accomplishments of our Libyan Space Campers serve as a superb example of how science can be used to bring people together. The Ambassadors



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and the rest of the audience were very impressed by the film and amazed that such cooperation existed between the United States and Libya. Following the presentation, many of the Ambassadors were interested in carrying out a similar program in their host countries.

The space camp program you are about to see on film was designed particularly for Libya. It does not exist anywhere else in the world. It is intended to expand and highlight the people-to-people relationships that now exist between our two nations after more than three decades of separation. You represent the first group from North Africa to attend U.S. Space Camp and only the second group from the Arab world.

As we continue to build and normalize our bilateral relationship, we will inevitably run into problems in the political arena which are related to our two governments' policies. But what must remain constant, and what we must protect at all costs, are U.S.-Libyan people-to-people exchanges, such as this one. As Secretary Clinton noted in her speech in Morocco on November 3, the United States is committed to educational engagement with Muslim youth, and Space Camp is a successful example of that engagement. I think this program also demonstrates what President Obama outlined in his June 4 speech in Cairo, when he marked a "new beginning" in America's relations with the Muslim world. Science education is one way to open both doors and young minds, whether in Libya or anywhere else in our region.



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Over the past eleven months that I have served as Ambassador, the U.S. Embassy has concentrated on capitalizing on the reservoir of good will towards America and Americans that has endured in the face of three decades of political isolation. We recently had the opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving with more than 300 Libyan alumni who studied at U.S. universities in the '60s, 70's, and 80's. Prior to that, we held an Iftar during the Holy Month of Ramadan that highlighted President Obama's vision of a new relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. Additionally, we have sent more than 150 Libyan students, professors, academics, journalists, business people, and others to the United States on scholarships and exchange programs such as Space Camp.

Our consular services are key to our people-to-people ties. Since we opened the Embassy's consular section in April, we have issued more than 3,000 visas to Libyans traveling to the U.S. for business, tourism and studies. The United States wants to deepen its relationship with Libya and hopes that Libya will begin to open its doors as well to American students and tourists.

All of these are encouraging signs that the people-to-people aspect of our relationship is blossoming. The story of Libyan Space Camp is a story that we want you to tell to your friends and family. We want you to talk about what you experienced in the United States, the people you met, the friends that you made, and the things that you have learned.



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The famous American Astronaut, and one of the first people in space, John Glenn said that “The most important thing Astronauts can do is to inspire young minds and to advance the kind of science, math and technology education that will help youngsters take us to the next phase of space travel.”

I truly believe that is what was accomplished with the Libyan Space Camp Program. Thanks to the outstanding job of Director Tarek Baghdadi and his film crew, we now have an audio-visual account of the event, which will serve as a testament to the accomplishment of our young Libyan astronauts and will be played in Libya and abroad, promoting the type of people-to-people diplomacy that is essential in this globalized world.

As you will see, the young astronauts in the movie were truly moved by their Space Camp experience. We hope to continue the program next year, using a combination of Embassy and private funding. If you or your child are interested in the possibility of participating in Space Camp 2010, please speak with one of our Public Affairs officers during the reception.

Thank you again for coming, and thanks to our young astronauts for their courage to take one small step for man, but one giant leap for mankind!

I hope you enjoy the film.